

It is a great privilege to be here with you in Catalunya. I bring with me warm wishes from the Scottish National Party and the people of Scotland.

It is very pertinent and exciting to be here as you consider what strategy to adopt on the road to independence between 2012 and 2014.

Of course, 2014 is a very exciting year for Scotland and the independence generation. As I am sure many of you will know, the SNP Scottish Government is committed to holding a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014.

In May of last year we broke the d'hondt system and did what no other party in Scotland could do - we won an overall majority in Parliament, thus giving us an overwhelming mandate to ask the people of Scotland a question that will change future of our nation for the better.

That question is:

Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?

Over the next two years we will put our case to the people of Scotland. We will put across the case for independence with hope, with vision and with a positive narrative.

Our work so far

We're out on the doors and university campuses asking the independence question and friends, the answers are mind blowing.

The people of Scotland are ready for freedom and the people will deliver it.

In Glasgow, polls show university students voting in majorities of fifty and sixty per cent to support independence.

On the island of Lewis they're asking why Scotland is powerless with pensions and benefits. Not with independence.

In Dundee they're asking why, in winter, pensioners have to choose between heating or eating. Not with independence.

In Renfrewshire 17 year-olds are asking why Scotland doesn't get a say over illegal wars. Not with independence.

In Edinburgh Telford College students are asking why we don't have the economic levers to decide our own finances. Not with independence.

Scotland in the world

And just recently - in East Dunbartonshire – they were asking why we have the abomination that is nuclear weapons on the River Clyde. Friends – not with independence.

Not ever. We are a peaceful nation - the days of the cold war are over. There is, I believe, no place for nuclear weapons in the 21st century and Scotland will be a world leader in ending them.

Independence is normal

The challenge for this independence generation - not just in Scotland, but even in Catalunya is to talk about independence in normal terms. Because independence is normal.

When the United Nations was formed, there were just over 50 independent countries in the world. Today, that figure has risen to almost 200. Of the 10 countries that joined the European Union in 2004, a majority had become independent since 1990, and Scotland is bigger than six of them.

All of these nations now have a seat at Europe's top table - a right Scotland should enjoy too.

In Scotland the anti-independence politicians lie to our people and they will lie to talk Scotland down.

First they say that Scotland is too small. That is absolute nonsense.

Malta has a population the size of Edinburgh.

The Isle of Man has a population of only 80,000 people!

Ireland, only across the water just across the water has a similar population!

And last but by no means least, Norway, has a similar population a similar economy and similar resources! They invested their oil money and have a great standard of living.

Scotland's achievements so far

Our people are not stupid and they will reject the arguments of the anti-independence parties.

The anti-independence parties say Scotland is too stupid to be independent. Again, this is absolute nonsense.

I would argue that we are actually the most innovative country in the world. We invented the:

- Bank machine
- Penicillin
- The television
- The steam engine
- The telephone

We have a proud history and regularly punch above our weight. Scotland is not too stupid - we will thrive in the world stage as a normal independent nation.

Then the anti-independence parties always say Scotland is too poor to be independent.

Well, why does the UK keep us? Are we not surely a hindrance?

The reality is that Scotland is a very rich nation.

An independent Scotland would be 6th in the league table of developed nations in terms of GDP per head. That's not our figures, by the way – that's the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Perhaps the UK wants to keep Scotland because, over the next six years, the Office of Budget Responsibility forecasts that the North Sea will generate another £54 billion in tax revenues.

Scotland has also got huge potential for renewable energy that brings jobs to our economy and attracts international investment.

Like you, we have a huge tourism industry. That creates jobs and pumps billions into our economy each year.

We also export lots of food and drink. Just last week I was at a reception for Scots whisky and they were telling us how 90% of Scotch whisky is exported. Did you know that exports alone make about £125 per second for the UK balance of trade?

The whisky sector supports some 35,000 jobs in Scotland, which is pretty significant.

With independence I would argue that we'd have more jobs! There are so many in London right now. Independence will mean we finally stop subsidising the south east England economy.

And yes, we do have oil. We have another 40 years worth, as it happens.

We can invest in an oil fund like Norway, who saved during the good times and tapped into its £300 BILLION oil fund during the recession.

In the 1970s, Professor Gavin McCrone, a civil servant, wrote a report for the then UK Government. In his report he said, and I quote:

"The country would tend to be in chronic surplus to a quite embarrassing degree and its currency would become the hardest in Europe, with the exception perhaps of the Norwegian kroner. Just as deposed monarchs and African leaders have in the past used the Swiss franc as a haven of security, so now would the Scottish pound be seen as a good hedge against inflation and devaluation and the Scottish banks could expect to find themselves inundated with a speculative inflow of foreign funds"

He went on to say:

"What is quite clear is that the balance of payments gain from North Sea oil would easily swamp the existing deficit whatever its size and transform Scotland into a country with a substantial and chronic surplus".

Friends, Professor McCrone's report was locked away in a filing cabinet for 30 years and never saw the light of day. That's the kind of tactics anti-independence politicians deployed in the 1970s – that's the kind of tactics they're deploying now, in 2012.

The anti-independence parties hoped oil would run out and the case for Scottish independence would be killed stone dead. Our case has never been stronger.

The UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, even said at a recent BP investment in Aberdeen, and I quote:

"It is a huge national advantage having such a brilliant oil and gas industry here in Aberdeen and here in the North Sea".

London wants Scotland's oil and we say no. It's Scotland's oil.

It is simply wrong to say that Scotland cannot afford independence.

However, I would argue that Scotland cannot afford to be in the Union. The UK is holding us back.

On an internationally comparable basis Scotland's population share of UK gross debt in 2012 would have been approximately 66% of GDP – lower than the UK (76%), the Eurozone (86%), the EU (80%) and the G7 (114%).

We can and will thrive, economically, as a normal independent nation.

Put simply, the fundamental reason for Scotland being independent is that Scotland is a nation, and nations are best served when they govern themselves.

We – the independence generation – are ready to deliver freedom for our people.

This theme – the independence generation – is something I'm keen to develop tonight.

We, everyone in this great hall, are the independence generation. This is not just a campaign – we are a world wide movement.

There is no doubt that, Scotland becoming independent, will have significant ramifications across the rest of Europe, perhaps no-where more so than here in Catalunya.

I have watched with great interest the campaign for independence here in Barcelona. At times it has seemed that your campaign is further advanced than ours! At other times, it seems that we are further ahead. Although I would argue that, although the independence debate has snowballed in Scotland, hear me now when I say that we stand with you – shoulder to shoulder – in your fight for independence too.

We are the independence generation – and together we will deliver independence for our people.

The challenge for you, just as for Scotland, is to talk about independence with confidence, positivity and the promise of hope.

People respond to hope, ambition and a positive vision. That is exactly how we make our argument for independence in Scotland. The single most responsive statement people respond to is:

No-one cares more about Scotland than the people who live here. Why shouldn't people who live here decide what happens in our nation? Why should decisions about our nation taken be taken in a Parliament in another country?

That argument is progressing well in Scotland and the number of people polled who support independence is increasing daily. Just two days ago, bookmakers slashed the odds that Scotland would become independent.

My faith prohibits me from gambling, but if I were a betting man, I would bet my life savings that Scotland would be independent in just two years time.

Between now and referendum day we will not rest in Scotland, and we will keep chipping doors, keep making a positive case for independence and keep winning yes votes for Scotland.

Conclusion and dedication

The challenge of winning independence is a cause we owe to the people who have gone before us.

Scotland has been blessed with a great family of nationalist politicians and patriots stretching back over many generations.

For me personally, a great friend, colleague and Nationalist MSP – no longer with us on this earth – Bashir Ahmed, once said:

“It isn't important where you come from, what matters is where we are going together as a nation”.

That is the internationalist view of my party, Scotland's Party.

We will take that internationalism onwards to independence.

Bashir Ahmed was part of a previous generation no longer with us. As the First Minister, Alex Salmond, announced that the referendum would be in 2014, I found myself getting a bit emotional.

So many people worked towards this great moment in history. So many people won't see it, but, friends, we – the independence generation – will. Previous generations have entrusted us with the single biggest challenge of a lifetime. A challenge that rests on our shoulders, a challenge on which the hope of millions depends. The challenge of independence.

We are the independence generation and together we will go forward to freedom.

Thank you.